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INDEX CARDS

Old Oklahoma-1890
Opening-Pottowattomie
Farming Conditions
Shawnee Indians
Shawnee Dances
Shawnee Indian Ball Games
Shawnee Burial Customs
Chief-Big Jim

BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

219
4364

Field Worker's name _____

This report made on (date) May 26 1933

1. Name _____

2. Post Office Address John Henry Bennett, Jr.

3. Residence address (or location) Norman, Oklahoma

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day 105 South Porter Year _____

5. Place of birth Tennesse _____ 21 _____ 1887

Tennessee, Maury County

Name of Father _____ Place of birth _____

Other information about father J. H. Bennett _____ South Carolina

7. Name of Mother _____ Place of birth _____

Other information about mother Lily Smith _____ Mississippi

almost all Irish.

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story of the person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects and questions. Continue on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached _____.

I came to Oklahoma in the fall of 1890 from Danville, Yell County, Arkansas, in a wagon drawn by oxen. My father, his family, and my wife and I made the trip together. We landed at the foot of Havel hill about seven miles east of Norman in Cleveland County, on what is now highway number 9, commonly known as Denver Highway. We rented a farm from Cradle Runyan, then we went down south of Pauls Valley and picked cotton until it got so cold we could not stay longer. We came back to our rented place and began making preparations for our next year's crop.

My wife and I had thirty-five acres. We traded off our oxen and later bought a good horse. We made a fine crop of corn and cotton. This place had a one-room log house on it.

When the Pottawatomie country opened we (my father, three brothers and myself) made the run on foot and as we thought, staked us a claim, but it so happened that we all got on Indian land, so we were left out.

Later on in the year, however, I bought Henry Saloon's right on 160 acres on Rowlett Creek. He had starved out

and wanted a pony I had to get away on so, he offered me his right for the pony. It was a fine bottom land farm. His only improvements were a dugout and about an acre of cleared land.

I put up a large log room, dug a good well, cleared and broke out about fifty acres that fall (year of 1891). The following year we raised over four hundred bushels of fine corn, fifteen bales of cotton, and pumpkins, galore, to say nothing of our fine garden. We dried pumpkins and corn and that year we payed out only twenty-nine dollars for groceries. We had thirty-five pounds of meat and we seasoned with butter, as we had two fine cows. We also had plenty of cool sweet milk and corn bread and from our early and late gardens we had plenty of greens, etc.

Flour sold for from seventy-five to ninety cents a sack. The neighbors would cut a load of wood one day and take it to town the next, then they would sell it, get a sack of flour, and come home. We bought all of our supplies at Norman.

We lived on this place forty-one years and had accumulated quite a lot of stock, etc., so after the Armistice

was signed I had a public sale and disposed of all we had. I bought property in Norman and took a job as jailor and under-sheriff under Ben Wheelis who later was replaced by Will Newblock. This work was too hard on me and after seventeen months I had to resign.

I then traded my Norman property to my nephew, Jim Bennett, for an interest in the Denver Store. My brother and I operated this for twelve months, then I sold out to him and moved back to some property I had in Norman. Soon after this I traded the Norman property for a fruit farm at Noble and two years later I traded the farm and moved back to Norman. I put in a wagon yard and ran a feed store for fourteen months; then I bought out my son-in-law at Big Jim and ran the store there for fourteen years. Three years ago I sold out and quit for good.

While I was on the farm I hired some Shawnee Indians to pick cotton for me. They were good workers but they wanted their pay every night and if they couldn't figure it up themselves they would get some of the educated Indians in the crowd to figure it and they would know to a penny what was due them. They went barefooted when

it was cold but every hot or warm day they would wear their shoes.

While in the store business these Indians traded with me, as my store was in the Pottawatomie country. They used the "helpy selfy style" in being waited on. They would go around and get everything they intended to buy and bring it around and say: "Check me up, Johany." Then at pay day they would pay up. Their biggest item was candy. Everytime they bought anything, candy was on the list. They drew money from the agency toward the last of every month. Very few were poor pay.

They have a dance ground there near Big Jim and have four dances a year. They believe in a hereafter and these dances play a part in connection with their religion.

The bread and squirrel dance comes about the middle of May. The men go out and hunt for three days prior to the dance, then they come in, skin the squirrels, and stew them. The bread and squirrel is then spread on a sheet and their preacher gets up and preaches for an hour or two; then they eat and the dance follows. These dances usually last all night.

The Green Corn dance comes when the corn is in roasting ear stage. They always have an Indian ball game which lasts three hours or better with no intermissions. They have a ball similar to a golf ball only larger and they always play fair. There are goals similar to a foot ball goal and they kick the ball over the goal. The women always play against the men. There are no fixed number of players. All play that want to play.

They have the war dance, when the men all paint up, have wild riding, and yell wild yells and war-whoops.

(Mr. Bennett says the name of the fourth dance has escaped his memory.)

When these Indians die they dig their grave about three feet deep, put the body in, and cover it with something, then put a layer of bark all over it and take poles three to five inches in diameter and notch them down solid to poles which have been put in each corner of the grave, covering the entire body over with these poles. Then they put in about eight to twelve inches of dirt which leaves about a foot space for all of their possessions to be put in on top of that. This is all covered overhead with a house made of poles and covered with a kind of bat or clapboard affair.

One time when a young woman died, for some reason she was put up on a scaffold eight or ten feet high, made of poles, and was left there over night before being buried.

Finally all of my brothers bought homestead rights near where I was and in 1894 or 1895 the Bennett School house was built. It was named for my father and us boys. Bennett School is twelve miles from Norman--ten miles east and two miles south.

Big Jim was chief of the Shawnees for years and established this dance ground that is used yet by the Shawnees. His son, Little Jim, is the present Chief. Ella Little Jim Beaver is Big Jim's daughter and her husband is Dudley Beaver. They both live near Big Jim crossing on Denver Highway (known as highway 9) close to the present site of the community center being built there for the Indians.